

Business Research Guide for E346K

THE GENERAL LIBRARIES
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Accurate, up-to-date information is essential to good business decisions. The ability to locate, evaluate and use information is therefore an important skill for all business majors. The research strategy explained here will help you locate information on a particular topic in the field of business. This research strategy is a process that you can use successfully in other assignments, both in school and in your career.

Though most of your research will be done in the Perry-Castañeda Library, (PCL), you may find that some resources for your topic are in other libraries or collections on campus. To find the specific sources you'll need, use the General Libraries' Selected References Sources bibliography (available free of charge in PCL and General Libraries branches) or ask a librarian for help.

Your
Assignment

1. Choose a preliminary topic - something of interest to you in the field of business - and discuss it with your instructor.
 2. Following the steps outlined below, read some background information on your topic, narrow or modify the topic as needed, and gather relevant citations from the subject card catalog, bibliographies and indexes.
 3. Prepare a research proposal, not more than five pages long, that states your topic, explains why it is significant, lists at least five information sources, (such as books or periodical articles) that you plan to use in your final paper, and evaluates and compares two of these sources.
 4. After reviewing the proposal with your instructor, go on to complete your research and reading and prepare your final paper.
-

GET ORGANIZED

Successful research requires a certain amount of record-keeping. You will examine information sources for their content and keep track of what these

items are, so that you and readers of your paper can find them later. A note-taking system that serves both purposes is explained below.

Parts
of the
System

Bibliography cards: index cards on which you record the information you'll need to cite the item in your paper. For books, a complete citation includes author/editor/, title, publisher, and place and date of publication. For articles, note the author, article title, magazine/journal title, volume number, date, and page numbers. For government documents and technical reports, include the complete name of the issuing agency or group.

Note cards: larger cards or sheets on which you record notes or quotations for later use. Be sure to mark all quoted material clearly, and to write a short bibliographic reference ("Anderson, p. 72") at the top of each note card.

Style manual: Your instructor will tell you the appropriate style manual (a reference book giving correct form for footnotes and bibliography entries) for your field.

Besides supplying yourself with the proper equipment, you can also manage your time to create a successful outcome. You will probably need 5-10 hours for actual library research on this project, plus time for in-depth reading. Schedule a certain block of time for each major step. When the need arises, give yourself a break! Take time out to think about where you are and about the value of the items you're seeing; if necessary, jot down a few notes or talk your project over with someone else.

CHOOSE A PRELIMINARY TOPIC

To select an appropriate topic, you first need to choose a preliminary topic which you think might be interesting. It could be an industry, a process, a problem or a concept in the field of business. Your preliminary topic may not be the same as your final topic; generally, researchers narrow their focus as they go along.

A good topic has several characteristics. First, it is interesting to you. It is significant: most people in the field know about it, some have written about it, and there is often some controversy among the experts. It is appropriate for your intended audience: not so basic as to be common knowledge, nor so technical as to be beyond the reader's grasp. It is timely, but not so timely that nothing has yet been written about it. And, most important of all, it is not too broad. Specific topics are "researchable", because they give you a means for selecting some information sources and deciding to ignore others. One of the best ways to narrow a topic is through background reading, described in the next step.

Result

A statement of your preliminary topic. Discuss the topic with your instructor before going any further.

FIND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Background sources can give you an understanding of the context of your chosen topic, a basic knowledge of the commonly accepted facts about the topic, an idea of the major ongoing controversies on the topic, and an increased vocabulary of key terms to use in your later research. Besides providing factual information, these sources often contain bibliographies of essential works on the topic that you can use as you begin building your own working bibliography. General and specialized encyclopedias and handbooks are good background sources for most topics.

Using these sources, you may not find an article that is specifically on your topic. Look for a slightly broader article that may include your topic, and check the index in the last volume of multi-volume encyclopedias to find references.

If you can't locate any background information, you may have a problem with the topic you have selected. Your topic may be too recent to be covered in well-established encyclopedias, or it may embody a radically new approach to existing knowledge, or, just possibly, it may not be a "researchable" topic. Talk to a librarian before you spend any more time on research! The time you spend on solving the problem now will save you many frustrating and unproductive hours later.

The information you find in background sources almost automatically helps you narrow your topic, as you react to what you read by identifying issues, asking questions and developing specific interests. Here are some examples of how preliminary topics might be narrowed:

PRELIMINARY TOPIC:

fast food industry

electronic funds transfers

multinational corporations

government regulation of
business

NARROWED TOPIC:

What marketing strategies are
used by the fast food industry?What effects have EFT's had on
banking industry procedures?What are the most common manage-
ment problems faced by multina-
tional corporations?What effects do government regu-
lation have on prices in the coal
mining industry?

Result

A statement of your narrowed topic and some general notes on basic facts, issues, and controversies.

A list of key terms that describe your topic.

Bibliography cards listing the background sources you've used plus any items cited in their bibliographies that you want to use.

FIND WHAT'S BEEN PUBLISHED

There are several ways to locate published items on a topic. To locate books, you can begin by using the Public Catalog at the PCL. This card catalog has two sections: Subject (for concepts) and Name/Title (for names of people and organizations). Before using the subject catalog, you need to consult the Library of Congress List of Subject Headings (located near the catalog) to determine what heading(s) are used for your topic.

Another way to locate published items is to use retrospective bibliographies or guides to the literature. These sources, which are basically lists of items on a given topic or in a given subject area, are somewhat selective and often include only significant items; some are annotated to give you an idea of what the individual items are like.

Result

Relevant items listed on bibliography cards.

A refined list of useful key items.

FIND RECENT INFORMATION

Because of the importance of up-to-date information in the field of business, articles published in periodicals, newspapers and trade journals are often the best sources to use. To identify articles on your topic use the indexes listed in the Selected Reference Sources bibliography for your field.

Many indexes are now also available in computerized form and can be searched online by librarians who are subject specialists. There is normally a charge for this type of search and it is probably not appropriate for this assignment. However, if you do an extensive research project, such as a thesis or professional report, you might want to consider this service. See the brochures on Computer-Based Information Services for more information.

Result

Relevant, recent items listed on bibliography cards.

LOCATE SPECIFIC ITEMS

At this stage of your research, you do not need to read every item in your working bibliography. Review your bibliography cards and choose those items that seem most important; for your research proposal, you will need to list at least five of these and evaluate two in detail.

If you are working in PCL, use the Name/Title section of the card catalog to locate books. The handout "How to Find a Periodical in PCL" explains how to use this catalog to find periodicals. If you need to locate an item

that doesn't seem to fit into these categories, or if you can't find what you want, ask a librarian for help.

The General Libraries' collections include more than 4.5 million volumes, but your research may have turned up some items that are not available here on campus. If this happens, and you feel the item is very important to your project, and if you have at least three weeks' lead time, as a librarian about Inter-Library Loan Service; we may be able to obtain the item you want from another library.

Result Content notes on at least five significant items.

PREPARE YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL

People in academic, business and professional careers often have to prepare proposals in order to secure approval, time or funding for projects they would like to carry out. While the means of presentation may vary, the heart of such a proposal is essentially what you have just done: an analysis of a topic and a survey of relevant information. In preparing your research proposal, imagine your audience to be a person or group who know something about your subject field in general, but not very much about your topic. Your objective is to persuade this audience that your topic is significant and that the research you've done demonstrates that you can complete the project successfully.

Result A research proposal, not more than five pages long, that:

1. States your topic.
2. Explains why it is significant.
3. Lists at least five information sources such as books or articles that you plan to use in your final paper.
4. Evaluates and compares two of these sources in detail: why is each relevant? what kind of information do they give? do they cover recent knowledge or give an historical perspective: are they reports of the writer's own research or someone else's? do they cite other useful items? do the authors' qualifications or the place the items were published suggest authoritative knowledge?

COMPLETE YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT

With your proposal and preliminary bibliography as starting points, you will now complete your research and write your final paper according to the guidelines given by your instructor. The sources and techniques you used in preparing your proposal can be applied to your final paper. If the working bibliography you have assembled so far is sufficient, you can proceed to locate more of the items and read them in-depth. If you need to search for more information, check additional indexes. Ask a librarian for help if the steps outlined in this research guide don't result in enough useful material.

At any time during your research, you may need to find specific facts, such as definitions, statistics, dates, formulas or biographical data. There are literally thousands of reference books to help you do this. Some of these are listed in the Selected Reference Sources bibliographies. Also remember that the library's information specialists will help you search for whatever information you need.

Result

A research paper that explores and explains a significant concept or problem in business.

The paper is clearly focused and addressed to an audience of informed, but not expert, readers.

The information presented is drawn from a variety of sources that are documented in the style appropriate to the field.

Social and Behavioral Sciences Research Guide for E346K

THE GENERAL LIBRARIES
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

The ability to gather, evaluate, and communicate information is an essential skill in all areas of the social sciences. The research assignment in this course is designed to develop your skills in these areas. The research strategy that you follow to complete this assignment is a process that you can use successfully in other tasks, both in school and in your career. The strategy takes you from the general to the specific, from older materials to recent developments. As you go through this process, you will become familiar with both the library that contains the information you need and the standard sources basic to your subject field.

Though your research will probably begin in the Perry-Castañeda Library (PCL), you may find that the most important resources for your topic are in other libraries or collections on campus. To find the specific sources you'll need, use a Selected Reference Sources bibliography (available free of charge in PCL and General Libraries branches) or ask a librarian for help.

Your
Assignment

1. Choose a preliminary topic--a significant problem or issue in your subject field--and discuss it with your instructor.
 2. Following the steps outlined below, read some background information on your topic, narrow or modify the topic as needed, and gather a list of relevant sources from bibliographies and indexes.
 3. Prepare a research proposal, not more than five pages long, that states your topic, explains why it is significant, lists at least five information sources (books and articles, for example) that you plan to use in your final paper, and evaluates and compares two of these sources.
 4. After reviewing the proposal with your instructor, go on to complete your research and reading and prepare your final paper.
-

GET ORGANIZED

Successful research requires a certain amount of record-keeping. You will examine a variety of materials for their content and keep a record of them, so that you and your reader can find them later. A note-taking system that serves both purposes is explained below.

Keeping
a
Record

Bibliography cards: Index cards on which you record the information you'll need to cite the item in your paper. For books, a complete citation includes author/editor, title, publisher, and place date of publication. For articles, note the author, article title, magazine/journal title, volume number, date, and page numbers. For government documents, technical reports, etc., include the complete name of the issuing agency or group.

Note cards: Larger cards or sheets on which you record notes or quotations for later use. Be sure to mark all quoted material clearly, and to write a short reference ("Hamsun, p. 72") at the top of each note card, so you know who gets credit in the footnote.

Style manual: Your instructor will tell you the appropriate style manual (a reference book giving correct form for footnotes and bibliography entries) for your field.

PLAN YOUR TIME

You will probably spend about 5-10 hours doing the library research needed for your research proposal. In-depth reading requires additional time. Schedule a certain block of time for each major step. When the need arises, give yourself a break. Take time out to think about the information you have found and about the value of the materials you're using. If necessary, jot down a few notes or talk your project over with someone else.

CHOOSE A PRELIMINARY TOPIC

Consider this assignment as a kind of experiment: you're testing a topic to see whether there is sufficient literature and what that literature has to say. Your preliminary topic may not be the same as your final topic; generally, researchers narrow their focus as they go along.

A good topic has several characteristics:

1. It is significant - people in the field generally know about it and material has been written about it.

2. It is interesting - it may be a unique theory, a discovery that is startling in its implications, or controversial, but it is never predictable, dull, or "old news" to the world at large.
3. It is particular - it focuses on an issue, major implications, important concepts or consequences; it does not attempt to present a history or survey of a subject. The focus of the topic you choose to research provides you with a basis for selecting some information sources and ignoring others.

One of the best ways to narrow a topic is through background reading, described in the next step.

Result A statement of your preliminary topic. Discuss the topic with your instructor before going any further.

FIND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Background sources are used to give you an understanding of the context of your chosen topic, a basic knowledge of the commonly accepted facts about the subject, an idea of major ongoing controversies, and an increased vocabulary of key terms to use in your later research. Besides providing factual information, these sources often contain bibliographies of essential works on the general topic that you can use as you begin building your own working bibliography. General and specialized encyclopedias and handbooks are good background sources for most topics.

When using these sources, expect to find articles that are broader than your topic. These slightly broader articles may include references to what you want. Check the index at the back of multi-volume encyclopedias to find references that relate to your topic.

If you can't locate any background information, you may have a problem with the topic you've selected. Your topic may be too recent to be covered in well-established encyclopedias, or it may embody a radically new approach to existing knowledge, or, just possibly, it may not be a "researchable" topic. Talk to a librarian before you spend any more time on research. The time you spend on solving the problem now will save you many frustrating and unproductive hours later.

The information you find in background sources helps you to narrow your topic as you react to what you read by identifying issues, asking questions, and developing specific interests. Here is an example of how a preliminary topic might be narrowed:

PRELIMINARY TOPIC

NARROWED TOPIC

FINAL TOPIC

(Keep an open mind!)

The aged in
America

the impact of
"senior citizens"
on the political
process.

The Gray Panthers
have organized the elderly
into an effective politi-
cal force. How does the
recent election in Florida
demonstrate the impact the
growing elderly population
can have on social services?

Result

A statement of your narrowed topic and some general notes
on basic facts, issues, controversies, etc.

A list of key terms that describe your topic.

Bibliography cards listing the background sources you've
used, plus any items cited in their bibliographies that
you'd like to see.

FIND WHAT'S BEEN PUBLISHED

One of the most efficient ways to identify published material on a topic is to use the bibliographies that skilled researchers have already prepared. Such bibliographies are selective and list only significant sources; many provide annotations that describe each source. If you find a bibliography related to your topic, you will not have to spend so much time locating and scanning materials to see if they are useful. Use retrospective bibliographies or guides to the literature (described in the appropriate Selected Reference Sources list) to find lists of good sources on your topic.

You can also use the Public Catalog in PCL, as well as individual card catalogs in the branch libraries, to search for items on your topic. The PCL catalog, which lists items in all parts of the General Libraries, has two sections: Name/Title (for persons) and Subject (for concepts). The Library of Congress Subject Headings books, located near the catalog, tell what headings to use for a given topic. When you look in the catalog itself, be alert for any subdivisions of your subject that may make it easier to find specific kinds of books (such as bibliographies) or books dealing with specific time periods or places. For more information about the card catalog, use the flip-chart on "How to Use the Public Catalog" or ask at the Information Desk.

Result Relevant items, recorded on bibliography cards.

 A refined list of useful key terms.

UPDATE YOUR INFORMATION

In the previous step, you used bibliographies that cover items published up to a certain date. The next step is to check sources that come out regularly and cover current literature. Indexes enable you to identify material that has appeared in magazines, journals, and other periodicals. Some indexes include abstracts, or summaries of the articles, that will help you to decide which articles are most useful for your topic. Use indexes to find information that is more recent than the material you have already identified. Indexes and other sources that lead you to recent materials are listed on the library handout.

Many indexes are now also available in computerized form and can be searched online by librarians who are subject specialists. There is normally a charge for this type of search, averaging \$10-\$20. For this assignment, such a cost may not be appropriate. However, for theses and other extensive projects, and for searches on very complex or very new topics, a computer search can be an effective alternative. See the brochure on Computerized Information Services available at the Information Desk in PCL for more information.

Result Recent, relevant articles on your topic, listed on bibliography cards.

LOCATE SPECIFIC ITEMS

At this stage of your research, you need to examine the items that you have listed to find out more about your subject and to determine which ones you will read.

If you are working in PCL, use the Name/Title section of the Public Catalog to locate books. The handout, "How to Find a Periodical in PCL," explains how to use this catalog to locate periodicals. If you are working in a branch library or special collection, look for signs, displays, or handouts describing how to locate materials. If you want to see an item that doesn't seem to fit into these categories, or if you can't find what you want, ask a librarian for help.

The library collections at UT/Austin include more than 4-1/2 million volumes, but your research may have turned up some items that are not available here on campus. If this happens, and you feel the item is very important to your project, and if you have a few weeks' lead time, ask a librarian about interlibrary loan service; we may be able to borrow the item you want from another library.

After you locate specific items, read the sources that seem to be the most useful. Take notes. Review the information you have collected so far, and plan your next step.

Result	Content notes on several sources that discuss your topic in detail.
--------	---

PREPARE YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL

People in academic, business, and professional careers often prepare proposals to secure approval, time, or funding for projects they would like to carry out. While the means of presentation may vary, the heart of such a proposal is essentially what you have just done: an analysis of a topic and a survey of relevant information. In preparing your research proposal, imagine your audience to be a person or group who know something about your subject field in general, but not very much about your topic. Your objective is to persuade your audience to agree that the topic is significant and that the research you have done on it demonstrates that you will be able to complete your research project successfully.

Result	<p>A research proposal, not more than five pages long, that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. States your topic. 2. Explains why it is significant. 3. Lists at least five information sources of various kinds (books, articles, etc.) that you plan to use in your final paper. Use the appropriate style manual for form. 4. Evaluates and compares two of these sources in detail. Consider such questions as: Why are they relevant? What kinds of information do they give? Do they cover recent knowledge or give an historical perspective? Are they reports of the writers' own research or someone else's? Do they cite other useful items? Do the authors' qualifications, or the places the items were published, suggest authoritative knowledge?
--------	---

COMPLETE YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT

Your next step is to prepare a finished research paper according to the guidelines furnished by your instructor.

After reviewing your research proposal with the instructor, you may want to make changes in topic, approach, type of sources used, etc. If the working bibliography you have assembled so far is sufficient, you can proceed to locate more of the items and read them in depth. If you need to search for more literature, check additional bibliographies and indexes. Ask a librarian for help if the steps outlined in this worksheet don't result in enough useful material.

At any time during your research, you may need to find specific facts: definitions, statistics, dates, formulas, biographical data, etc. There are literally thousands of reference books to help you do this. Some of these are listed in the Selected Reference Sources bibliographies. Also remember that the library's information specialists will help you to search for whatever information you need.

Result

1. Explores and explains a significant issue or concept in the social sciences;
2. Is clearly focused;
3. Addresses a defined audience of informed, but not expert, readers;
4. Draws information from a variety of sources;
5. Is documented in the style appropriate to the field.